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Fifty-second Session

Official Records

8th plenary meeting
Tuesday, 23 September 1997, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Udovenko ..... (Ukraine)

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Address by Mr. Juan Carlos Wasmosy, President of the Republic of Paraguay

The President: The Assembly will first hear an address by the President of the Republic of Paraguay.

Mr. Juan Carlos Wasmosy, President of the Republic of Paraguay, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations the President of the Republic of Paraguay, His Excellency Mr. Juan Carlos Wasmosy, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Wasmosy (*interpretation from Spanish*)**:** It is a great honour for me to address this great Assembly in my capacity as President of the Republic of Paraguay. I take this opportunity to express my deepest thanks to the President of the General Assembly at its fifty-second session, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko. Also, I would note the excellent work done by Ambassador Razali Ismail, who so efficiently guided the work of the last session. In addition, I should like to extend my best wishes to Mr. Kofi Annan, in connection with his responsibilities as he exercises his functions as Secretary-General of the Organization.

For the people of Paraguay, throughout the long struggle to acquire and strengthen their democratic institutions, the United Nations has always been a universal forum that ensures the free debate of ideas and the participation of all the peoples of the world, without exclusion or discrimination, the vital issues involving development, equity, the maintenance of peace and the preservation of the environment.

Because of the great importance my country attaches to this forum, we recognize the urgent need to support the institutional reform of the United Nations by strengthening the General Assembly and democratizing the Security Council — adding both permanent and non-permanent members — so that this institution will be able to respond appropriately to the new challenges facing the international community.

Last August last I had the great honour of chairing in Asunción the eleventh summit of the Heads of State and Government of the Permanent Mechanism for Consultation and Policy Coordination — the Rio Group — the members of which are Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Guyana, Honduras, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela. There a Declaration was adopted on the strengthening of the United Nations and the reform of Security Council, stressing certain principles and guidelines that I shall now describe.

The Declaration of Asunción expresses, first, full support for multilateralism, sovereign equality of States and steadfast respect for the rule of law.

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Second, it expresses support for the Secretary-General's initiative in putting forward a broad programme for reform, presented on 16 July of this year, particularly reforms designed to strengthen the effectiveness of the Secretariat and to emphasize activities to promote economic and social development.

Third, it notes the relevance of the process of increasing the membership of the Security Council and to reforming it to correct the imbalances in its current membership, improve its decision-making mechanisms, make it more transparent so that it will reflect in a more legitimate and representative manner the overall membership of the Organization.

Fourth, it states that, because of its legal traditions and contribution to the cause of peace, the Latin American and Caribbean region should be given special consideration in any proposal to increase the membership of the Security Council.

Fifth, it expresses the conviction that reform of the Security Council must respect the principles of equitable geographical distribution and the sovereign equality of States, and that any reform that entails discrimination by developed countries against developing countries would be unacceptable.

Sixth, it expresses the ideal of moving towards the total elimination of the veto and, as a first step, limiting its use to actions taken under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter.

Seventh, it expresses the importance of transparency in management and decision-making in the Security Council and increasing the number of open meetings and orientation meetings at which the Secretary-General or his special representatives present reports.

Eighth, it considers that the increase in the Security Council's membership, the reform of its working methods and the question of the veto are integral parts of Council reform and must be addressed in the same agreement.

Ninth, it expresses the explicit resolve of our Governments to continue to participate actively in the Working Group in order to reach general agreement on this matter.

Let me say once again that this increase in the permanent and non-permanent membership of the Council must necessarily envisage the presence of Latin America and the Caribbean and other geographical groups without any form of discrimination whatsoever. In this connection, Paraguay reaffirms its support for permanent membership for Brazil, Germany and Japan.

It is also important to note that the process of reforming the Organization must include a plan to eliminate unnecessary expenditures and an attempt to merge programmes designed to further the development of our peoples, which will lead to an optimum utilization of available resources as well as to the elimination of duplication in the use of human, technical or economic resources. The serious financial problems of the United Nations deserve sincere and determined consideration.

I am pleased to say that my country has always, in so far as it has been able, honoured its international commitments, aware that the Organization's proper functioning requires the appropriate and equitable distribution of its administrative costs among all Member States.

This moment in history is indeed a very special one. Alliances are now being replaced by complementarity. Isolationism and confrontation have given way to globalization and cooperation. We no longer speak of rivalry and struggle but, rather, of honest and creative competition. The asymmetries in the world order that have historically meant that some nations have been subordinate to others are now themselves being subordinated to this influx of solidarity and mutual assistance.

It is of course true that many serious conflict areas continue to exist, but Paraguay is pleased to note the commendable efforts that the United Nations has made in the maintenance of peace in various areas of tension, and we have followed closely the Organization's initiatives in such new areas of conflict as Cambodia and Sierra Leone, for whose peoples my country most sincerely wishes the immeasurable benefits of peace and harmony.

We have also followed with keen interest the disturbing developments in the Middle East situation, and we urge the parties there to redouble their efforts to seek a lasting and stable peace. We warmly welcome the actions taken by the mediating nations, which untiringly continue to participate in all negotiations.

With regard to the particular case of the Republic of China on Taiwan, Paraguay welcomes the attitude adopted by that country's Government and expresses its hope that

there will be movement towards reconciliation and that it will be possible to resolve the differences with the People's Republic of China.

In keeping with the principle of the universality of the United Nations, all States that meet the requirements set forth in the Charter have the right to seek admission or membership. In this respect, we believe that it would be advisable to reconsider General Assembly resolution 2758 (XXVI), which completely denies the 21 million inhabitants of the Republic of China on Taiwan the fundamental right to participate in international organizations and their activities.

The challenges of peace, security and equilibrium are more relevant to us today than ever before, and they are an absolute imperative for building a world that guarantees development to nations in a context of universal harmony.

On the crucial issue of world disarmament, allow me to reiterate Paraguay's position of support for United Nations efforts in this sphere. My country welcomes optimistically the preparatory work for the Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) to be held in the year 2000, hoping that by then the Treaty will have become universal. That Treaty, the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, the efforts of States to reduce their arsenals and the establishment of new nuclear-weapon-free zones are all important elements that will help prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons and eventually achieve general and complete nuclear disarmament.

True to its pacifist principles, the Republic of Paraguay has been following the Ottowa process with great interest. We recently took part in the Oslo Diplomatic Conference, which adopted the definitive text of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, and we supported the majority position of the principal States to seek appropriate and effective legal mechanisms to prohibit the manufacture, use and distribution of the cruel devices of death and pain that are anti-personnel landmines.

We congratulate the international community on that decisive step, and we reaffirm our unswerving decision to sign the Convention. We urge other Governments to do the same without any doubt or delay, so as to ensure its earliest possible entry into force.

I should also like to reaffirm my country's unswerving commitment to continue the struggle against terrorism, a destabilizing force that negates human rights and threatens to undermine the very foundations of security in our regions.

It is fitting here to stress that Paraguay, along with the entire international community, is concerned about the growth of drug trafficking. We therefore firmly reiterate the Paraguayan people's determination to combat that scourge and its resolve to take integrated and concerted action, within the context of international cooperation and in conjunction with producing, transit and consuming countries.

In this connection, I am pleased to inform the Assembly that in October 1996 my country's Parliament, at the initiative of the Executive, adopted a law that establishes norms and punishments for the crime of laundering money or goods derived from illicit traffic in narcotics, psychotropic substances or dangerous drugs, thereby significantly improving the legal framework for combating such crimes head on.

On 10 December 1998 we shall celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the proclamation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a major landmark in the history of humankind and its endless struggle to ensure dignity and reciprocity among human beings. Much of what we have achieved along the way has been the product of blood and pain, but with due satisfaction we can now confirm that the principles and objectives of the Declaration are increasingly being put into effect and that the concept of a State based on the rule of law is gradually becoming part of our national realities. Moreover, the new culture of democratic solidarity has managed convincingly to combat any aspirations for a return to anachronistic times in our political history characterized by authoritarianism and the denial of human rights.

For Paraguay, the road to freedom and the establishment of an institutional basis which sits well with our republican ideals has been long. During this journey, my Government has helped make the dream of every Paraguayan a reality: the establishment of a system guaranteeing full freedom and a strengthened democracy allowing the peaceful transfer of the presidential mandate to another candidate, elected by the people, who will take up the office of President of the Republic in August 1998.

This is in keeping with the undeniable achievements of the World Conference on Human Rights held in Vienna in 1993, which reaffirmed the universality and indivisibility of human rights, while recommending that greater attention be paid to the links between democracy, development and the satisfaction of the basic needs of the most disadvantaged sectors of the population.

My Government has therefore tried to strengthen the interrelationship between democracy, development and human rights, thus combining these democratic achievements, through a plan for social action designed to create opportunities so that all citizens, through their own efforts, can enjoy all the benefits of human development.

Obviously, a central feature of democratic governance is concern for social problems. If our democracies do not adapt to these new realities, not only will they be impossible to govern, but they will remain on the sidelines of history. Even worse, that all the sacrifices made to strengthen our institutions may have to yield to populist and Messianic pressures.

I am pleased to state today that my Government has been able to lay the foundations for true development, without making any Messianic promises or pandering to the populists. I should highlight the significant progress made in the institutional framework of this process, with electoral reform that has enabled us to move satisfactorily through all the stages of the democratic schedule. Equally historic is the balance achieved in civil and military relations, following the successes of April 1996, when popular pressure and the enormous weight of solidarity on the continent thwarted attempts to take us back to outdated forms of autocracy.

I am convinced that our fledgling democracy has gathered new strength since those events and that it will be an insuperable obstacle to any attempts to bring down our institutions. Furthermore, the changes to the administration of justice, with a multiparty Supreme Court, prevent any manipulation or distortion of the mechanisms laid down by the Constitution and the laws of the Republic.

Management by parliament has become part of the process of joint cooperation in government, and this has been an enriching experience in the democratic life of the country.

Paraguay has a young population which is eager to learn. Current and future generations must be able to equate a free economy with democracy and democracy with a State based on the rule of law, with guarantees for human dignity.

During the Eleventh Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Rio Group, which was held in my country, I spoke enthusiastically about the need for a bold strategy to back up the ideals of democracy, sustainable development, equity and integration, and placed particular emphasis on what I called "education for democracy".

The training of young people in this emerging world must include guidelines based on sound ethical and doctrinaire principles. The young must be given experience in how to handle modern technological tools, so that they can deal with the requirements of the new political, economic and social processes which are defining the current and future development of our nations.

Further thought needs to be given to the environmental issue. Five years after the Rio Conference, the Republic of Paraguay is building on the increasing awareness of the need to preserve the ecosystem, whose priority nature is reflected in the 1992 Constitution. But I must also emphasize how urgent it is to give full effect to the principle of common but differentiated responsibility put forward in Rio. If it is to be valid, this principle must enjoy the support of richer countries in terms of financial and technical assistance, so that we can put an end once and for all to the "ecology of poverty" which forces many sectors of poor countries to destroy their environmental basis with the simple and tragic aim of ensuring their subsistence from day to day.

I have every reason to be satisfied that my Government has been able to institutionalize various instruments to improve the quality of the environment in our country — in particular, the strategy for managing, using, preserving and protecting natural resources in the context of the programme for change in Agenda 21, whose basic aim it is to strengthen the process of sustainable development.

Highlights of the new environmental legislation now in force include laws on evaluating the environmental impact, on wildlife, on protected rural areas and on penalties for ecological offences. In the context of the Agenda for Change, we are ratifying international agreements, and taking account of the importance of international cooperation on the environment. With regard to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious

Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa, we submitted the legal instrument for ratifying the instrument in January this year. In this context, the countries that share the *Gran Chaco Americano* — Paraguay, Bolivia and Argentina — have entered into a new relationship based on a model of cooperation for sustainable development in this vast region.

There is an old saying that nobody is so rich that he does not need anything and nobody is so poor that he has nothing to give. In line with those words of wisdom, every Member State of this Organization has given and received. In the particular case of Paraguay, I have to point out that international cooperation has played a decisive role, and its true dimensions can therefore be assessed and appreciated. For this reason, I am particularly grateful to the United Nations, whose presence in Paraguay, through its various specialized agencies, has been and continues to be so positive and dynamic.

Just over six years ago the Argentine Republic, Brazil, Paraguay and the Eastern Republic of Uruguay, and later, the Republic of Chile and the Republic of Bolivia, as associated members of the Southern Cone Common Market (MERCOSUR), decided to cooperate in a spirit of solidarity in order to gain an increasingly advantageous position in this globalized and dynamic world. In that context we have reached undeniably relevant milestones for the present and future of our peoples.

Today, it is recognized that in MERCOSUR we are on the right path, and we are receiving an encouraging message from the outside world concerning our integration. Our efforts are focused on trying to establish a common market, within a gradual and continuous process in which the basic stages still need to be rounded off, improved and studied in depth.

MERCOSUR's experience is expanding. This is an important regional bloc. We have opened negotiations with the Andean Community and the United Mexican States, and we hope that by the end of this year agreements will be signed allowing for trade preferences in the region. Moreover, MERCOSUR participates in the Free Trade Area of the Americas, and there are proposals to conclude shortly a hemispheric free trade initiative involving the 34 countries of the Americas.

MERCOSUR is also expanding towards the European Union. We are making progress in defining political decisions which would encourage the establishment of a free trade zone between the two customs unions.

This has been my third address to the General Assembly as President of the Republic of Paraguay. I am here today to reconfirm on behalf of my country — a founding Member of the United Nations — our commitment to the lofty ideals that inspire us. Our Organization needs to be adapted and reformed so as to be able to respond effectively to the major challenges of the next millennium. Paraguay undertakes to make its contribution to attaining those noble objectives.

At this very special moment I warmly embrace the Assembly, not only in the name of my people, but also on behalf of myself, Juan Carlos Wasmosy, a citizen with faith in democracy, struggled for his country's freedom and won.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Paraguay for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Juan Carlos Wasmosy, President of the Republic of Paraguay, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Agenda item 9 *(continued)*

General debate

The President: I call first on His Excellency, Mr. Keizo Obuchi, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan.

Mr. Obuchi (Japan) (spoke in Japanese; interpretation furnished by the delegation): I should like at the outset to extend my warmest compliments to His Excellency Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko, Foreign Minister of Ukraine, on his assumption last week of the presidency of the fifty-second session of the General Assembly. Japan will cooperate closely with him for the success of this session.

Mr. Mohammed, Ethiopia, Vice-President, took the Chair.

I should also like to pay sincere tribute to His Excellency Mr. Razali Ismail, who, as President of the fifty-first session of the General Assembly, demonstrated active initiative for strengthening the functions of the United Nations through reform. Japan earnestly hopes that Ambassador Razali will continue to contribute his views for the advancement of United Nations reform.

This session of the General Assembly will be an "Assembly for reform". I say this because the current session is of unprecedented importance in terms of realizing the reform of the United Nations.

I should like to recall what the purpose of United Nations reform is. The purpose of reforming the United Nations is, I believe, to strengthen its functions to further enable it to fully accomplish its tasks. As a member of the Security Council, Japan is deeply aware that since the end of the Cold War grave problems of conflicts and poverty have emerged, most frequently and acutely in Africa. By reforming the United Nations, the international community will be better able to solve the problems of peoples in all parts of the world who are suffering due to conflicts and poverty, problems which are especially glaring in Africa. We must begin immediately to strengthen the United Nations in this respect and continue our efforts into the future. Japan intends to play the role which is expected of it in the strengthened United Nations.

I regard highly the strong initiatives of the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, in promoting reform. In particular, his proposals for United Nations reform announced in March and July of this year are intended to enhance the coherence and effectiveness of United Nations activities by strengthening the leadership of the Secretary-General as well as the coordination function in each field, including development and humanitarian affairs; as such, they have Japan's basic support. We earnestly hope that the reform of the United Nations as a whole will gather momentum through these proposals.

If the United Nations is unable to reform itself to meet the demands of the coming era, but simply engages in an aimless repetition of detailed arguments in which each Member State pursues its own interests, the confidence of the international community in the Organization will be severely undermined. We must be aware that at this moment we are standing at a crucial crossroads. It is the very moment at which we must summon the political will to decide on the outlines of United Nations reform.

Japan believes that each Member State should, in a spirit of statesmanship, engage in substantive negotiations, not from the viewpoint of pursuing its own parochial interests but from the genuinely broad perspective of maximizing benefits to the international community as a whole.

Japan believes that reforms relating to the Security Council, finance and development are the three pillars of United Nations reform. Today, the Security Council is attentive to the economic and social aspects of the conflicts it seeks to resolve. Moreover, in order to establish a sound financial basis, it is necessary that all the activities of the United Nations, including those in the fields of development and peacekeeping, be rendered more effective. Serious efforts in the area of development are also important for ensuring international peace and security. It is therefore essential that reform in these three areas be achieved as a whole in a balanced manner in order for the United Nations, the sole universal organization, to respond appropriately to the dramatically changing context of the international community and to be better able to discharge its functions.

Now I would like to reiterate Japan's views on some of the most important points regarding the United Nations reform effort.

First, the reform of the Security Council.

Needless to say, the international community is vastly different today from what it was 51 years ago, when the United Nations was founded. Broadly speaking, this is reflected in the following two ways.

First, in addition to those States that were originally expected to assume primary responsibility for international peace and security, other States have newly emerged with the capacity and the willingness to play a global role. Secondly, many States have in the meantime become independent, and today they represent a majority in the international community, in which they have become important players.

Particularly in the wake of the cold war, the Security Council is expected to play an even greater role in the area of international peace and security. To meet such expectations, it is essential that it be reorganized to adapt to these two changes, thereby enhancing its legitimacy and effectiveness. This is the very essence of Security Council reform. It is with such a reformed and strengthened Security Council that effective measures to resolve, for example, the frequent conflicts in regions such as Africa become possible.

It is from this perspective that many States, including my own, are advocating the expansion of both permanent and non-permanent membership. If the reform were to result in an expansion of only the non-permanent membership, the Council's legitimacy and effectiveness

would not be enhanced and genuine reform to adapt to the changing times would not have been accomplished.

This year, under the leadership of former General Assembly President Razali, discussions on Security Council reform have gained greater momentum than ever before. Japan strongly urges that we seize this opportunity to decide on at least a framework for Security Council reform and reach an agreement on an outline for the realization of concrete reform by the end of the year. I should like to reiterate that Japan, with the endorsement of many countries, is prepared to discharge its responsibilities as a permanent member of the Security Council in accordance with its basic philosophy of the non-resort to the use of force, prohibited by its Constitution.

I shall touch next on financial reform. Today a further retrenchment by the United Nations in the area of finance is required, and Japan regards highly the Secretary-General's efforts towards this end. The Government of Japan is itself currently pursuing drastic reform of its financial structure, with the aim of bringing its financial deficit below 3 per cent of gross domestic product by the year 2003. It is also essential for the United Nations to secure a solid financial basis for itself. In this regard, I would emphasize again that it is the obligation of Member States to pay their assessed contributions in full, and that Member States in arrears should make every effort to eliminate them.

It goes without saying that the expenses of the Organization must be apportioned more equitably. As regards the basis for calculating the scale of assessments, Japan has advocated adopting the concept of "responsibility to pay" to complement the present method, which is based on the principle of "capacity to pay". Japan's assessment is about to reach that of the United States, and it is already almost as great as the assessments of the other four permanent members combined. If Japan's assessment were to increase further out of proportion, with reform of the Security Council not yet realized, I must say there would be a problem with respect to the fairness of such a situation. Japan strongly hopes that the financial reform of the United Nations will proceed together with reforms in other areas as a whole in a balanced manner, and that agreement on an equitable scale of assessments can be achieved.

The third point relates to reform in the area of development. Development and peace are, so to speak, two sides of the same coin. Without development, the causes of conflicts will not be eliminated, and without peace the conditions for development will not be met. Under its present Constitution, Japan has continued to attach great importance to contributing to international peace through its active involvement in development issues and humanitarian assistance efforts. Involvement in development issues is a matter of priority for my country, and its commitment to the development of developing countries remains unchanged.

Japan has been insisting that a "new development strategy", based on a genuine partnership between developed and developing countries, is particularly necessary in this post-cold-war era. Consideration of the Agenda for Development has concluded recently. We believe it is important that the new philosophy, based on the ownership of developing countries and on a genuine partnership, be widely shared in the United Nations. Towards this end, in July of this year Japan held the Okinawa Conference on Development, and this month co-hosted with the Kingdom of the Netherlands the Conference on the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development/Development Assistance Committee (OECD/DAC) Strategy "Shaping the Twenty-first Century: The Contribution of Development Cooperation". We are thus exploring ways of promoting and realizing this strategy. Through such efforts by Japan, it is becoming widely recognized that South-South cooperation, fortified with the new dimension of triangular cooperation, is an important means of promoting this strategy.

We regard the Secretary-General's proposals to establish a United Nations development group and to consolidate United Nations offices at the country level to be very worthwhile in terms of increasing efficiency. United Nations reform must not be a euphemism for budget-cutting. From this point of view, Japan, with the support of many States, has been advocating the idea of reinvesting in development programmes the savings that accrue from reforms. We urge that this proposal, which is reflected in the Secretary-General's reform plan, be quickly implemented. In addition, Japan hopes that the year 2001 will be designated as the International Year of Volunteers in order to encourage more active participation in United Nations activities at the grass-roots level.

Setting development on track and eradicating poverty in Africa are necessary for the fundamental solution of the conflicts that frequently occur in that region. Bearing this in mind, Japan has been focusing its efforts on African development issues. At Japan's initiative, plans are under way to hold the second Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD II) at the

ministerial level next year in Tokyo, following a preparatory meeting, also in Tokyo, at the senior-official level in November of this year. We would like to ask the States concerned to cooperate for the success of these conferences and for the achievement of substantive progress in promoting African development.

Ever since becoming a Member in 1956, Japan has consistently pursued a foreign policy that attaches importance to the United Nations. Since January of this year, thanks to the support of many countries, Japan has been serving its eighth term as a non-permanent member of the Security Council. It has been actively cooperating in United Nations peacekeeping operations and efforts for the prevention and settlement of regional conflicts. Next January, Japan will convene the International Conference on Preventive Strategy, which Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto proposed at the fifty-first session of the General Assembly of the United Nations. We anticipate that concrete proposals will be made at that conference as to how cooperation between the United Nations and the Organization of African Unity, and the strengthening of the functions of the United Nations through such measures as reform of the Security Council, can contribute to the prevention and early resolution of conflicts in Africa. I am also pleased to announce that next March Japan plans to convene in Tokyo an international conference on the present situation and future prospects of United Nations peacekeeping operations.

Japan is also hosting the third session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Kyoto this December to decide on international measures to prevent global warming to be taken after the year 2000. Global warming is a critical issue, with implications for the future of humankind, and its solution will require the efforts of every country, including developing countries. Japan is sparing no effort to ensure the success of this conference and its adoption of a protocol that is meaningful, realistic and equitable, and I would earnestly ask for the cooperation of all participating countries.

Next year we shall observe the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. I expect the United Nations to further strengthen its role in the areas of human rights and refugee and humanitarian assistance. Japan will also continue to contribute actively in these areas.

In addition, disarmament efforts, as well as the regime for the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, must be further strengthened for the sake of world peace and stability. Japan will also emphasize at this session the importance of steady and cumulative efforts to take realistic nuclear disarmament measures, aiming for a world free of nuclear weapons. We will also participate actively in discussions on anti-personnel landmines, the review of the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms and the question of small arms.

The twenty-first century will arrive in less than four years. In order to make the next century brighter, the United Nations should reform itself to be ready for the new era. If it is to do so, an agreement on the outline of United Nations reform must be reached this year. Let us join forces to ensure that the world in the twenty-first century is stable and prosperous. This will require that we greet the twenty-first century with United Nations reforms achieved.

I should like to conclude my statement by stressing the profound importance of strengthening the United Nations — the only universal international Organization.

The Acting President: I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Finland, Her Excellency Ms. Tarja Kaarina Halonen.

Ms. Halonen (Finland): Let me extend to you, Mr. Vice-President, my warmest congratulations on your election.

The Foreign Minister of Luxembourg, Mr. Jacques Poos, spoke on behalf of the European Union. I fully associate myself with his statement.

The reform of the United Nations is inevitable. The new imperatives of globalization and interdependence must be recognized. Business as usual would inevitably lead to the marginalization of the United Nations in world affairs. I fully agree with Secretary-General Kofi Annan that we should see these changes as an opportunity, not as a threat.

Reform is in the interest of all Member States, whether big or small, whether industrialized or developing countries. Where else but at the United Nations can we deal with the truly global issues such as the new security threats of uncivil society, environmental degradation, violations of human rights and poverty? Given the nature of these issues, unilateral, bilateral or even regional efforts are of course good, but not enough. Not even the most prosperous and powerful nations on earth can

successfully solve them alone. Only the United Nations has a global mandate and global legitimacy.

The Secretary-General's proposals are well attuned to our thinking in Finland. The General Assembly should consider these proposals as a coherent whole and give the Secretary-General the authority to act on them during this session. For our part, we, the Member States, must shoulder our responsibility for those reforms that require action by Governments.

Human rights must become an integral part of all United Nations activities. We very much welcome the Secretary-General's comprehensive approach in this regard.

The celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights next year must produce practical results. The celebration is an opportunity to emphasize that human rights are universal rights that belong to all individuals, irrespective of culture or political systems. The duty of Governments is to promote, secure and protect these rights. Therefore, the international community has the authority to deal with human rights violations wherever they may occur. There is no difference between big or small States in this respect. Europe is by no means an exception. The common standards must be valid everywhere. The United Nations has a unique role to play because of its global reach. I personally respect and support regional arrangements and efforts to this end, but they must be in accordance with common United Nations standards.

There is a genuine and growing demand for United Nations action in the field. The United Nations response today is hampered by inadequate resources. I pledge my Government's full support to Mary Robinson, the newly appointed High Commissioner for Human Rights, in her important and challenging task.

We in Finland are very serious people. We try to practise what we preach. Promoting human rights, including minority rights, is an integral part of our domestic policy and naturally extends to foreign policy. As a new feature, the Government intends to submit an annual report to Parliament on the human rights situation in the world. We hope such reports can and will contribute to a more regular and informed public debate on human rights issues.

The United Nations has extensive experience in crisis management and peacekeeping. Lessons have been learned. One key lesson is the need to prevent emerging conflicts rapidly and coherently. Rapid decision-making is imperative both in the Security Council and at the national level. Once the political decisions are made, they should be implemented effectively and without delay. That is why we strongly support the establishment of a rapidly deployable mission headquarters. Finland has contributed to it financially and is also ready to make personnel available. We urge the Secretary-General to establish the headquarters without further delay.

The recent local elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina were undoubtedly a success. The implementation of their results is the challenge for the coming weeks and months. The Dayton peace process is advancing, but at a disappointingly slow pace. Restoring normal living conditions will require major efforts by all the parties in the region. The international community, the United Nations and other organizations will have a tremendous task in assisting people to help themselves in this devastated region. The High Representative for the Implementation of the Peace Agreement on Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mr. Carlos Westendorp, deserves our full support in securing the implementation of the Sintra agreements. There is also a need for the continued peacekeeping presence of the Stabilization Force (SFOR) or its successor force.

Africa is the one continent most ravaged by violent conflicts and human suffering. The special session of the Security Council on Africa at the ministerial level is therefore a timely initiative. Crisis prevention and peacekeeping capabilities in Africa should be developed as a priority. We welcome the efforts already under way within the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and other regional and subregional settings. However, these efforts need wider international support. Finland is prepared to continue to do its part by providing assistance in training. We are also organizing in Helsinki, Finland, together with the OAU, a broad-based international conference of non-governmental organizations to promote their international involvement in strengthening peace-building in Africa.

In the Middle East, events over the past year have taken a dangerous turn for the worse. Fulfilment of the obligations of the Oslo accords, and with it real improvement in the daily lives of the Palestinians, is still the best hope the parties have for a just and lasting peace. A turn for the better is first and foremost for the parties themselves to achieve. We urge them to exercise restraint in actions and in words. Finland, together with its European Union partners, is prepared to continue to play its part in supporting the peace process, but clearly the

parties themselves must play theirs for there to be a process to support.

The hopes for the peace process should not be betrayed in the face of provocation, humiliation or frustration. Terrorism is unacceptable. It only benefits the extremists on both sides.

In disarmament, the focus is shifting from weapons of mass destruction towards conventional arms, including small arms, as so many colleagues of mine have already mentioned here. The suffering caused by indiscriminate use of landmines is high on the United Nations agenda, and rightly so.

Finland welcomes the Ottawa convention. It is a step towards a truly global and effective ban on anti-personnel landmines, a target which my Government strongly supports. The Ottawa process contains a promise, but it is clear that much work is still needed. Participation in a total ban, particularly by those who are major possessors, producers and exporters of these weapons, must be secured through negotiations at the Conference on Disarmament. Finland will continue to participate actively in the Conference's efforts to stop the further spread of anti-personnel landmines through a global and effective treaty.

The positive trend in disarmament and non-proliferation has been strengthened by the entry into force of the Chemical Weapons Convention and the bilateral commitments made by the Russian Federation and the United States regarding nuclear disarmament at the Helsinki summit. To assure further progress, these developments should now be followed up by Russian ratification of the Chemical Weapons Convention and the START II agreement.

Finland has consistently advocated a strong United Nations, mandated and capable of addressing socio-economic and development issues in an effective and coordinated manner. In today's world, globalization of the economy, trade liberalization and the information revolution have created an environment of interdependence. Poverty, the root cause of so many other ills, can be eliminated only through sustainable development.

Finland, together with the other Nordic countries, has long spoken for a more unified United Nations system, both at Headquarters and at the country level. The Secretary-General's proposals go in the right direction. The creation of the United Nations Development Group is an important first step. Full integration at country level of all United Nations activities, including those of the specialized agencies, must remain the goal.

The Economic and Social Council and the web of organizations and committees operating within it need to be united in purpose and in action. The proposed reforms do not suffice. The coordinating role of the Council should be made real. To achieve this is the responsibility of the Member States. If we do not take action, the Council will sink into irrelevance.

Similarly, a more coherent United Nations response is required to provide protection and humanitarian assistance to the victims of disasters, whether made by man or nature. The Emergency Relief Coordinator must ensure coherence and coordination in disaster relief. In that role, the Coordinator must receive the full support of all the humanitarian agencies.

On the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of this Organization, I remember, more than 150 Heads of State or Government pledged their resolve to bring an end to the United Nations financial crisis. Today, two years later, only 89 Member States — I checked the figure today — have paid their dues in full and without conditions, and many of them did so late. More than half of the membership have not. Yet there are very few Member States whose non-payment stems from circumstances beyond their control, the only waiver known to the United Nations Charter. Non-payment is, in our view, a serious threat to the future of the United Nations, not only because of the unfair burden put on Member States that do pay, such as my country, but because it undermines the commitment and the solidarity that we as Member States share towards our common Organization and among ourselves.

Finland understands the motivation behind the Secretary-General's proposal for a revolving credit fund. However, such a fund — as we have understood it — would use voluntary contributions to cover unpaid legal dues. The United Nations might gain some respite, but so would the countries in arrears. Finland is not opposed to exploring this proposal if others so wish and if the establishment of such a fund is accompanied by real sanctions in case of non-payment of assessed contributions.

Yesterday, we heard the Secretary-General in his statement ask the Governments assembled here to make the fifty-second session of the General Assembly a

"Reform Assembly". This is a challenge that we and our Organization cannot afford to fail.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Portugal, His Excellency Mr. Jaime Gama.

Mr. Gama (Portugal) (*spoke in Portuguese: English text furnished by the delegation*): Allow me first to congratulate my colleague from Ukraine, Minister Hennadiy Udovenko, on his election to the presidency of the General Assembly, and to convey to him our appreciation and the confidence we place in his personal qualities and experience to steer the work of the current session. In his election, I see also the recognition of the role played on the international stage by Ukraine, a European nation with which we have friendly ties. I am pleased to recall the occasion on the margins of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) meeting in Portugal last May when he initialled a "letter on the special partnership between NATO and Ukraine".

I would also like to pay tribute to the outgoing President, Ambassador Razali Ismail, for the dedicated and competent manner in which he presided over the work of the fifty-first session of the General Assembly, and notably for his promotion of United Nations reform, which we consider to be essential.

I wish to express my appreciation to the Secretary-General for the new dynamism he has brought to the Organization and for the proposals he has made for its modernization.

My colleague from Luxembourg has already addressed the Assembly on behalf of the 15 member States of the European Union. However, I would like to reflect on a number of questions of particular importance to my country.

The main question on our agenda is undoubtedly the reform of the United Nations. Despite its achievements and increasing importance on the international stage, the United Nations today needs a profound transformation to enable it to face the challenges of the next millennium.

Portugal expresses its appreciation for the programme of reforms presented by the Secretary-General and reaffirms its readiness to participate in the further development of this initiative, taking up the challenge to build up a more effective Organization, with a better capacity to respond and a more rational utilization of its resources. The Portuguese Government supports in general terms the proposals contained in that programme.

Among the instrumental measures proposed, Portugal sees merit in the creation of the post of Deputy Secretary-General. We also welcome the proposal to rationalize the debates of the General Assembly so that it may focus on specific themes.

With regard to the area of peace and security, the primary focus of the action of the United Nations, we support the strengthening of its institutional capacity in the field of preventive diplomacy and of post-conflict peace-building. The creation of a rapidly deployable mission headquarters and the initiative of some Member States to constitute a high-readiness brigade are instruments that will permit the United Nations to strengthen its capacity to react to emerging crises. I am pleased to note that Portugal is ranked twenty-sixth among nations contributing troops for United Nations peacekeeping operations.

We also believe that cooperation between the United Nations and regional organizations should continue to be encouraged, particularly as concerns the African continent.

With regard to the defence and promotion of human rights, I would like to commend the emphasis given by the Secretary-General to its cross-sectoral nature, which must be taken into due account in all the activities and programmes of the United Nations.

In this context, we are also particularly pleased to see the proposal to fuse the Centre for Human Rights with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. The process of reform in this area will be carried out by the new High Commissioner, Mrs. Mary Robinson, whom I congratulate on her recent appointment.

The effectiveness of intervention by the United Nations in humanitarian assistance is of special concern to us, including within the framework of the Security Council. Therefore, Portugal welcomes the proposal of the Secretary-General to restructure this sector by strengthening the role of the Emergency Relief Coordinator, as well as the suggestion for the establishment of an Economic and Social Council segment for humanitarian affairs.

The promotion of social and economic progress is a fundamental goal of the United Nations. As the Secretary-

General rightly reminded us in an Agenda for Development, development cannot be attained in the absence of peace and security or in absence of respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Portugal notes with satisfaction the process of readjustment proposed by the Secretary-General to strengthen the macroeconomic coordinating mechanisms of the activities of the United Nations and its specialized agencies.

In the area of assistance for development, we see with equal satisfaction the focus on guaranteeing an integrated, coherent and coordinated activity of all funds, programmes and agencies involved. As we see it, however, such efforts must not jeopardize their respective autonomy and specificity.

We understand the goals of the challenge launched by the Secretary-General to replenish the levels of financing for development activities of the United Nations. For our part, we pledge to continue our efforts, within the limits of our capabilities. We also believe that the persuasion and mobilization of the private sector may turn out to be very useful at a time of acute budgetary restrictions.

In this context, and in the light of the increasing disparity between developed and developing countries, the proposal of the Secretary-General to channel savings resulting from reforms towards development activities is particularly welcome to us. The promotion of sustainable, equitable and socially just development has increasingly become a top priority for the United Nations. The guarantee of a balance between economic growth, the conservation of the environment and the protection of natural resources is essential for the future of our planet. Portugal therefore supports the proposals of the Secretary-General aimed at strengthening the United Nations Environment Programme as the core environmental agency of the United Nations.

Finally, we cannot fail to underline that the goal of the reforms, particularly in the economic and social sector, should not be exclusively to reduce costs but to rationalize structures and consequently to improve the capacity of the Organization.

We support a reform and enlargement of the Security Council that reflects the increase in the Members of the United Nations, takes into account the new political and economic realities and ensures fairer geographical distribution. In this way, the Security Council will be more democratic and therefore more effective in the formulation and implementation of its decisions.

With regard to the composition of the Security Council, we advocate an equitable increase in both categories of membership, encompassing all regional groups, in order to make it more representative.

As to the selection of new permanent members, we believe that certain criteria should be applied, namely, respect for the principles of the United Nations Charter, full acceptance of the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice and the capacity and will to contribute to the maintenance of international peace and security, as well as global influence.

The Portuguese Government reaffirms its support for the inclusion of Germany and Japan as permanent members of the Security Council. But it would be difficult to understand if the increase in the number of permanent members did not also include States from the regions of Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean. In this context, among eligible countries, there is Brazil, a founding Member of the United Nations, the largest country in Latin America and a State that is committed to the principles of the Charter.

Portugal believes particular emphasis should be given to the review of the working methods of the Security Council, not only in order to strengthen the transparency of its decision-making process, but also to create the conditions for an improved ability for non-members to accompany the work of the Council. In fact, this was one of the concerns of the Portuguese candidature for the Security Council for 1997-1998 and was one of the main priorities of the Portuguese presidency of the Council last April. Within the Security Council, we have advocated the holding of open Council debates to allow non-members to participate in discussions of matters of direct interest to them.

We have also encouraged the involvement of the Security Council in debating themes which have particular relevance to its work, such as the promotion of human rights, the protection of refugees, humanitarian assistance and the impact of sanctions, aiming at providing a more coherent framework for the Council to act in the future.

One of the most pressing concerns requiring an urgent response is resolution of the Organization's serious financial crisis. We believe that the solution lies in the full and timely fulfilment of obligations, the unconditional

payment of arrears to the Organization, review of the scales of assessment so as to reflect the real capacity to pay of Member States, and applying financial rigour and rationalizing the use of existing resources. These proposals seek to guarantee a sound financial base for the United Nations.

Portugal, a member of the troika of observer countries of the peace process in Angola, and a member of the Security Council, continues to pay particular attention to developments in that African country. We were particularly encouraged to witness the positive events of March this year: the formation of a Government of Unity and National Reconciliation including members of UNITA, as well as the return to the National Assembly of that movement's parliamentary group. These important fulfilments of the 1994 Lusaka Protocol, which is the framework for the entire process, were undoubtedly an important step forward in the eyes of all those, foremost among them the Angolan people themselves, who yearn to see this great African country enter fully into a future of peace, national reconciliation and economic and social development. We are therefore understandably concerned about the new difficulties affecting the peace process, which have already resulted in the timely, and we hope decisive, intervention by the Security Council through its resolution 1127 (1997), adopted last month. As we stated on the occasion of its adoption, we consider the terms of the resolution — the ability to impose sanctions — to be a stimulus for UNITA to fulfil its obligations under the Lusaka Protocol, which it accepted freely. This is not an attempt to condemn UNITA to isolation or to exclude it from the peace process, of which it is, and should continue to be, an integral part.

Peace in Angola is possible and necessary. But, as we have stated before, in the final analysis it depends on the political will of the Lusaka Protocol signatories. They must not, however, ignore the human, financial and material investments the international community has already made in Angola in defence of the peace process. Should the current impasse in the Angolan peace process continue, the international community will undoubtedly adopt the measures required under the circumstances. We therefore reiterate our appeal to the parties, and in particular to UNITA, to show the international community, by taking concrete steps, that they have decidedly opted for the road to peace, once and for all relegating to the past the spectre of a fratricidal war.

Finally, I could not end this reference to Angola without saluting the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Angola, Maitre Alioune Blondin Beye, who has been tireless in his mission to defend the peace process. We would also like to place on record our sincere appreciation to all those who, working with either great commitment with the United Nations Angola Verification Mission (UNAVEM III) or the United Nations Observer Mission in Angola (MONUA), embody the international community's hope that a brighter future awaits the Angolan people.

The President returned to the Chair.

Year after year Portugal has brought to the attention of this Assembly the question of East Timor. Some may have thought that time would consign this question to oblivion. But the events of this last year have confirmed that the problem of East Timor is more alive than ever before in the conscience of the international community. I recall the award of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1996 to Monsignor Ximenes Belo and José Ramos-Horta, two East Timorese who, in different fields, have greatly distinguished themselves in taking up the rights and the identity of the people of East Timor. The award of that Prize also demonstrates the respect and solidarity of world public opinion for the struggle of a people for freedom and for their inalienable right to self-determination, which all Members of the United Nations are duty-bound to respect.

Here, I would like to praise the recent initiative of the President of South Africa, Nelson Mandela, in support of the efforts of the Secretary-General, aimed at the release of the East Timorese leader Xanana Gusmao and of all other East Timorese political prisoners.

Unfortunately, this increasing international attention to the question of East Timor has not resulted in an improvement of the situation in the territory, where the systematic violation of the most basic human rights persists and whose people continue to be denied the right to express and affirm their identity, despite the deliberations, year after year, of the Human Rights Commission.

I would like to express our recognition of the new impetus which, in accordance with the mandate given to him by resolution 37/30, the Secretary-General has sought to give to the search for a negotiated settlement to the problem of East Timor by: appointing a Personal Representative dedicated exclusively to this matter, in the eminent person of Ambassador Jamsheed Marker; providing a more operational and active impulse to the tripartite negotiations under his auspices; and relaunching

the all-inclusive East Timorese dialogue which involves the active participation of the East Timorese in this process, involvement that is essential to its success.

Only through negotiations will it be possible to find a lasting solution to the problem of East Timor. Portugal is contributing, with hope and commitment, to this new cycle of negotiations aimed at achieving a just, comprehensive and internationally acceptable solution for East Timor, according to the terms of the Charter and the relevant resolutions of the United Nations.

Portugal has sought to give fresh impetus to its participation in international organizations, recognizing the dynamism and increased importance of multilateral forums in international life. Since the last General Assembly session, Portugal has hosted two important international meetings: the Summit Meeting of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the spring ministerial meeting of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Portugal has also recently hosted two rounds of negotiations on Western Sahara. We welcome the positive results achieved on this question by the special envoy of the Secretary-General, Mr. James Baker.

In 1998, Portugal will be hosting the eighth Ibero-American Summit, and will organize, in close cooperation with the United Nations, the first world conference of youth ministers, which will take action on the United Nations World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond.

I would like also to refer to the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries (CPLP). The promotion of the Portuguese language, spoken today by more than 200 million people, the new modalities of institutional cooperation which have been established and the coordination of the diplomatic and political positions of the founder countries in the many international forums involved, have made this organization, despite its youth, an attentive participant within the international community.

The problems associated with the many components of the drug phenomenon are among the biggest challenges faced by our societies today. The phenomenon particularly affects our young people, and its global nature certainly requires a concerted response on the part of the entire international community. In this context, and given that Portugal is presiding over the preparatory work for the special session of the General Assembly on drugs, which will take place in June 1998, I would like to underline the importance we attribute to that event. We sincerely hope that that session will produce a clear political commitment on the part of Governments to combat the drug plague, and that concrete steps will be taken in that direction. With a view to achieving these objectives, I appeal to Member States to be represented at the special session at the highest political level.

With regard to sustainable development, Portugal has closely followed the implementation of the principles established by the Rio Summit. The nineteenth special session of the General Assembly confirmed, however, that we are still far from implementing fully the goals established there. Allow me to underline the three components to which Portugal attributes particular importance: combating desertification, protecting the forests and protecting the oceans. Portugal considers that in the fight against desertification the United Nations Convention is the fundamental legal instrument for the implementation of new international actions on this matter. With regard to the northern Mediterranean, we will continue to promote the most extensive cooperation with our partners, and we are open to closer association with the countries of North Africa in a joint effort involving the entire Mediterranean region.

In the area of the preservation of forests, we support action undertaken, particularly in the context of the United Nations, with a view to the conservation, integrated development and sustainable management of this important heritage of mankind. I would like to draw attention to the holding in Lisbon in June 1998 of the third Pan-European ministerial Meeting on the protection of the forests, which we hope will contribute significantly to protecting forest ecosystems that have deteriorated.

As regards the oceans and seas, Portugal will continue to support efforts to preserve them, advocating in particular the more effective protection of marine biodiversity and the integrated management of coastal, continental and insular zones.

Following the proclamation of 1998 as the International Year of the Ocean, Portugal is proud to be organizing in Lisbon the last universal exposition of this century, Expo 98, which will be dedicated to the theme "Oceans: a heritage for the future".

Particularly relevant in this context will be the work of the Independent World Commission on the Oceans, chaired by the former President of the Portuguese Republic, Mr. Mario Soares, the conclusions of which

will be presented to the General Assembly at its next session.

I would like to end my statement with a word of hope and optimism for the future of the Organization. We believe in a revitalized and even stronger United Nations for the twenty-first century. The Assembly can count on our efforts to work towards that goal.

The President: I now give the floor to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, His Excellency Mr. Hans van Mierlo.

Mr. van Mierlo (Netherlands): First of all, allow me to subscribe to the statement delivered this morning by the Foreign Minister of Luxembourg, Mr. Jacques Poos, on behalf of the European Union. In particular, Sir, I wish to join him in his congratulations to you on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly.

As the year 2000 draws closer, our feelings somehow make us ponder more keenly the achievements and misfortunes of the present century, and make us look ahead to the next one. As I do this, central to my thoughts is the United Nations, an institution created when I was an adolescent, at the end of a war whose horrors were just then coming to light. I remember having been elated at the time about the purposes and principles of the new Organization, and I remember how intrigued I was to see that, in a way, devastation and despair had given rise to the belief that a better world could yet be built, a world marked by peace, development and respect for human rights, notions I was just beginning to learn about. Soon enough, I came to realize that such a world would be rather longer in the making than the Charter had led me to hope; that old questions were giving way to new ones; that the United Nations was not a panacea for all the troubles of mankind; and, more to the point, that the United Nations could never be stronger than its Member States collectively willed it to be.

Yet somehow my expectations remained, expectations which I shared with a growing audience around the globe, and which one generation was passing on to the next. Rightly or wrongly, nations and individuals, Governments, civil society and the public at large: they all have expectations about what the United Nations can do for them, and about how it might change their lives and their destiny for the better.

The question then is not so much whether the United Nations can meet all of those expectations. For it cannot, and it probably should not even try. The United Nations has neither the mandate, nor the resources, nor the power to be the world's keeper. The question is rather how we can exploit the strong points of the Charter, how we can make the United Nations play a role that only the United Nations can play, and how we can better equip the Organization to do more by doing what it does better. With that in mind, I wish to highlight three matters this afternoon: the fitness of the Organization; the potential of the United Nations to manage crises in the wider context of development; and the Organization's action in the field of human rights.

Part of the reason why the United Nations has problems in meeting expectations is what it has turned into over the past 30 years: an amazing structure of boards and committees populated by a growing membership and assisted by an army of civil servants. For that reason alone, the Organization has lost credibility. Efforts to streamline and revitalize the Organization are therefore long overdue. United Nations reform is a must. The proposals put forward by the Secretary-General are an important first step in that process, as the Foreign Minister of Luxembourg, Mr. Poos, said this morning, a process that will have to incorporate more ambitious ideas as it unfolds. The Kingdom of the Netherlands supports the Secretary-General in his reform drive, we applaud the fact that he has made reform his number-one agenda item, and we welcome the reform package Mr. Kofi Annan has put in our care.

But we should get on with it. The world cannot afford to wait. We are looking at an Organization that is far behind on its maintenance schedule. Yet over the past three years, the reform debate has inched forward as if oblivious to the need to produce results. Fortunately, the Secretary-General has injected new momentum into the debate, and we should all welcome this.

As we are about to engage in this "Reform Assembly", as the Secretary-General has called it, we should be conscious of the underlying concerns that have surfaced in the reform debate from time to time. These concerns are real, and dismissing them would jeopardize a promising outcome for the present session. Indeed, various groups of nations have doubts about what other groups of nations are ultimately aiming for in this exercise. Developing countries have even expressed misgivings about the reform process as a whole. Some of them are clearly afraid that major Western Governments

are out to recast the United Nations as an institution that would run on the lowest possible budget and concentrate on peacekeeping, humanitarian aid and human rights. Another concern is that the development programme of this Organization — perhaps its single most important achievement over the past 30 years — might actually suffer as a result of reform.

Understandably, many nations see the decline in recent years of official aid levels as the writing on the wall. They are disheartened by the empty promises of Rio de Janeiro in 1992. Moreover, they are worried about the current financial crisis of the United Nations. And finally, a handful of nations describe the Secretary-General's proposals as a "northern" package — one that caters mainly to the needs of the industrialized world.

Instead, developing nations would wish to see the United Nations strengthened in what to them is perhaps its most critical field of action, a field of action that corresponds to one of the main purposes mentioned in the Charter: social and economic development. They rightly argue that if the United Nations membership wants to be serious about that objective, it needs to equip the Organization accordingly. And so, in their view, more resources should flow into the Organization. Before consenting to change anything, they are inclined to play it safe and to hold on to what is there.

This line of thought, assuming I am reading it correctly, calls for comments. My first remark is that, clearly, the Secretary-General was well-advised in having most of his package focus on the economic and social sectors. This is indeed the area that commands the widest interest among the membership. If we look at the merits of the package, it seems fair to say that many industrialized nations might have wanted to see more ambitious and comprehensive proposals. Still, speaking for the Netherlands Government, I would argue that the present package of reform measures is well-directed, substantial and worthwhile. Evidently, the Secretary-General, on the basis of consultations which only he could undertake, has concluded that the contents of the package represent the maximum of what is achievable in the present state of play. And we should all accept that as a given.

Furthermore, it is important to remember that reform might strengthen the development sector of the United Nations to the point where it can actually deliver better service with the resources that are presently available. This exercise is not about cutting costs. Yet a leaner and meaner Organization might give better value for the money. At the same time, we welcome the idea of a development dividend, as put forward by the Secretary-General.

A stronger development sector may help make the United Nations a more attractive Organization not only to recipients, but to donor countries as well. Voluntary contributions should not come only from the same small group of traditional donors year after year. For a long time now, the Netherlands has been among the top contributors to the United Nations system, and we intend to remain so. We appreciate the spectacular gesture by Mr. Ted Turner. But donor contributions should also come from those nations that fall far below the 0.7 per cent mark, as well as from newly industrialized countries in Asia and elsewhere.

Finally, all Member States should become current and stay current on their financial obligations under the regular and peacekeeping budgets; and payments should be prompt, in full and certainly without conditions.

All in all, the heart of the matter is not about core concepts and not about mindset; it is about trust. It is about feeling comfortable with the idea that among 185 Member States, a difference of views is inevitable, particularly when they are asked to discuss such a wide-ranging matter as the future of this Organization.

We have arrived at a crossroads where we face a critical choice. This is a moment when we have to rise above the level of squabbling over details in working groups. No doubt, we all have a point to raise, a question to ask and a change to make. But that avenue would lead us nowhere, for soon enough the package would fall apart. Now is the time to start trusting each other. This is a time for vision and political courage. We, as statesmen, should be ready to accept our responsibility in this regard, to join forces and to forge a breakthrough. We should all rise to the occasion and accept the package of the Secretary-General as it is before us now and work out the details and implementation later. Endorsement in general terms needs to be expressed before we all adjourn next December. Without such endorsement, the momentum in the reform process will be lost.

We, the Member States of the United Nations, pledged ourselves, in the words of the Charter:

> "to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace".

Next to the United Nations development effort, peacekeeping and peace-building are perhaps the most visible part of what the United Nations does — an impression refreshed by Cable News Network (CNN) almost daily. More importantly, those who are on the run, who are afraid for their lives, who watch their homesteads invaded, who are occupied and repressed, who look starvation and genocide in the face — they have expectations of the United Nations. They expect the Organization to bail them out.

We need to improve the capacity of the United Nations to deal with crises, be they military, political or humanitarian ones, whether man-made or not. There is considerable room for improvement here, as illustrated by the situations in Bosnia, Somalia, Rwanda and Zaire. As we speak, innocent blood is flowing in many places around the world. Yet all too often the United Nations remains impotent. We cannot allow this to continue. Here again lies a major area where reform is indispensable, and the Secretary-General has duly underlined this.

A number of Member States, including the Kingdom of the Netherlands, have been trying to develop the concept of a standby high-readiness brigade within the framework of the United Nations standby agreements. They have been making modest progress over the last three years. A rapidly deployable headquarters is now being established. Tomorrow a small group of nations will informally deliberate on how to promote further steps. Several other initiatives are under way, including regional ones. Given the complexities, this is going to be an incremental process, but one where we cannot afford to let up.

The real test is where to position peacekeeping in the wider context of the overall concerns of the United Nations. Our agenda should be wider and should include conflict prevention and peace-building.

The difficulty we need to address here is how to integrate different policy instruments — political, military, relief, rehabilitation and social and economic development — into one comprehensive framework. Crises require a coherent and effective international response, a response that should integrate preventive diplomacy, political mediation and humanitarian relief, but also social action, economic alternatives and cultural communication. In sum: development.

Of course, prevention is the key. The United Nations can be much more effective when we invest in prevention. Diplomacy, economic sanctions, arms embargoes and political pressure will reduce risk and costs as compared to military intervention in an escalated conflict. We could avoid the loss of life and escape generalized human misery. As a result of timely prevention, we could also avoid the immense costs for rehabilitation, resettlement and reconstruction that arise after violence is over. Military intervention, under United Nations auspices, for humanitarian purposes may be necessary in certain conflict situations. But it should always be a means of last resort. Intervention implies that prevention has failed.

The link between development on the one hand and peace and security on the other is a tenuous one in the United Nations system. Yet experience has proved that making the link is imperative. We need to find the best combination of conflict management, humanitarian assistance and social and economic programmes to pave the way for sustainable development and for sustainable peace.

In San Francisco we promised to promote and encourage

> "respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all".

It is a pledge we will have to renew again and again, perhaps indefinitely. Yet such a pledge may not degenerate into lipservice. Commitments must be turned into reality; obligations must be implemented. We cannot let our guard down as we face reports on violations of human rights. Torture is still being practised on a wide scale. People continue to disappear. Arrest and detention without cause take place routinely. And freedom of the press is non-existent in too many countries.

Still, we recognize that human rights are in better shape worldwide than they were 10 years ago, and certainly 50 years ago. Totalitarian regimes have all but disappeared; democracy is on the rise. Also, there is more interest than ever before in the triangle of democracy, good governance and human rights.

Today, human rights are well established as an important objective in their own right and a major field of activity for the United Nations. But, perhaps more important, human rights have become a leitmotif in a wide variety of other areas of United Nations policy, from sustainable development to population, from trade to humanitarian aid, and from peacekeeping to human settlements. That human rights is a "cross-cutting" issue is evident from the reform proposals of the Secretary-

General and from the way he has revised the top management structure in the Secretariat — both of which we welcome warmly.

Expectations on what the United Nations can achieve in the field of human rights have run high, among victims of human-rights violations, among mothers of the disappeared, among grass-roots groups, and among non-governmental organizations. Then again, there are Governments that expect the United Nations to stay out of their precincts entirely: Governments that accept the universality of human rights, but only as a debating point; Governments that accept the United Nations actions against human rights-violations, but only at a theoretical level and not when it concerns them.

All in all, the instruments the United Nations can apply have become the core of an extensive machinery that in many cases has worked strikingly well. Examples are numerous and expanding. I refer to such diverse methods as international dialogue, the integration of human rights activities into cooperation arrangements, the work of human rights field offices, human rights education and strengthening regional supervisory machinery.

More recently, a new High Commissioner for Human Rights took up her position. If this is indeed the age of human rights, as the Secretary-General says, then Mrs. Mary Robinson will be one of its key personalities. We wish her courage and wisdom in her new assignment, and she can be sure of our commitment.

One major platform in the realization of human rights and the international administration of justice is soon to take its definitive shape. Next summer, a diplomatic conference will convene in Rome — we should all be grateful to the Italian Government for hosting it — that will, hopefully, adopt a convention establishing an international criminal court. Once established, the court will be the natural counterpart to the International Court of Justice. My Government is looking forward with anticipation to this new offspring in the international legal order, and I take pride in announcing that my country is offering to house the seat of the court, in the city of The Hague.

The fitness of the United Nations as an Organization, its capacity to manage crises in the wider context of development, and its action in the field of human rights are areas of ongoing concern to all Member States. This Assembly will continue to address them, either on their own merits or in the context of United Nations reform. The United Nations is expected to perform in these areas and to produce results. Yet there is only one way this is going to happen: if all of us join forces, join forces to make the United Nations a viable and credible institution, join forces to make it a centre for harmonizing the actions of nations in the attainment of these common ends. For only then will we keep the promise of San Francisco.

Announcement by the President: Expression of Congratulations

The President: The Assembly will next hear addresses by the Heads of State of Guatemala, Costa Rica, El Salvador and Honduras. In this connection, I have been asked by the Heads of State of these four countries, as well as the Head of State of Nicaragua, to request members of the General Assembly to first hear all four addresses before proceeding to the Indonesian Lounge to offer expressions of congratulations.

Address by Mr. Alvaro Arzú Irigoyen, President of the Republic of Guatemala

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Guatemala.

Mr. Alvaro Arzú Irigoyen, President of the Republic of Guatemala, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations the President of the Republic of Guatemala, His Excellency Mr. Alvaro Arzú Irigoyen, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Arzú Irigoyen *(interpretation from Spanish):* It is a great honour for me, as the representative of the people of Guatemala and as President *pro tempore* of the Central American Integration System, to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your well-deserved election to preside over the General Assembly at its fifty-second session.

We wish to thank the President and the Secretariat for their understanding in allowing us to alter protocol and to address the Assembly in the form of a joint presentation. We Central Americans deemed it necessary and timely to do so because we wish in this way to highlight the importance, the scope, the depth and the extent of the changes that are taking place in Central

America after years of confrontation and suffering for our peoples and our region.

We bring good news. Central America is undergoing remarkable changes, and the Central American leaders wish to share together here in this world forum the progress achieved in our region. We bring news of peace, democracy and development, news of understanding and cooperation, news of accord and unity. Our region is leaving behind years of internal war and authoritarianism to move into a constructive stage of political, economic, social, cultural and ecological strength, one that will enable us to enter the new millennium with new hopes and achievements by our peoples. And this new stage is being constructed with the respectful participation and responsible support of the international community.

We must recall that barely 12 years ago we Central Americans were on the verge of a regional war and that our countries were experiencing the with full intensity of being one of the last settings of the so-called cold war. But then negotiation prevailed over conflict and we found Central American roads to peace, which led, 10 years ago to the Esquipulas II Accords, embodying the procedure for a firm and lasting peace in Central America.

The processes of dialogue and reconciliation moved forward along difficult and complex roads. The heat of battle was replaced by the warmth of debate. Weapons were laid down, and we began the difficult but unpostponable march towards reconciliation, towards a return to the rule of law, towards democratic strengthening and towards peaceful and constructive coexistence.

As may be recalled, at last year's session I came before the Assembly anticipating peace in my country. In less than 10 months during 1996 we were able to complete negotiations on seven specific peace accords in Guatemala with the Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca (URNG) and thus, on 29 December of last year, we arrived at the signature of the final Agreement on a Firm and Lasting Peace. Thus we did put an end to the 36 years of internal armed conflict that had torn at the very vitals of my country.

As many here know, the process of complying with the accords has advanced with firm steps. Thanks to the will of the parties and the timely and determined collaboration of the international community, in barely three months the demobilization of the former guerrilla combatants was completed, with the assistance of a military Verification Mission of United Nations Blue Berets, approved by the Security Council.

Without going into undue detail, I can reaffirm what we reported a few days ago in my country: the process of compliance with the peace accords is going forward decisively with regard to all fronts and commitments. The joint commissions envisaged in the accords have already been established, thus creating the broadest and most diversified structures of citizen participation in our history. The commitments on investment and public expenditure on health, education, justice and security for the people are already reflected in detail in the budget for next year, not only increasing the ratio of social investment to levels unprecedented in our history but also changing their orientation in order increasingly to favour rural areas. The National Congress is ready to discuss the agreed constitutional amendments. Similarly, the agreed institutional reforms have begun to be implemented in all areas. The process of the return of refugees from the neighbouring brotherly country of Mexico will be completed before the end of this year, and the guerrilla organizations that formed part of the URNG, having been demobilized, are returning to legality and are becoming a political organization that will participate in future elections.

All of these important changes in my country are being verified and supported by the United Nations, for which we are deeply thankful. All these changes can be added to others that have already taken place in our isthmus and that are enabling us to rediscover our regional agendas of democratization and development. Indeed, while peace negotiations were progressing and maturing in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala, we once again undertook to revitalize our regional integration process. Following the finalization of the series of peace negotiations, that process of integration and regional development has taken on a renewed vigour and dynamism and has recently received a further important impetus. It gives us real pride and hope to be able to share with the Assembly a brief summary of our advances in that process and of the important decisions that we have recently taken.

Fully aware that the region is going through a rare historical moment, one characterized by the existence of popularly elected Governments in all of the countries of Central America and a situation of peace, we deem it essential to design and implement regional and unified responses to the demands of our peoples and the challenges of globalization.

During the past three years we have made extraordinary progress in our integration efforts, which extend from a new conceptual horizon, one that has become better balanced and more inclusive with the creation of the Alliance for Sustainable Development and the establishment of innovative regional projects to increase regional competitiveness by means of joint efforts on the part of Governments, academic centres and sectors of production.

We replaced the former common market in 1991 with a new legal framework that created the Central American Integration System (SICA). However, as we were also convinced of the need to go beyond mere governmental cooperation in our regional integration efforts, a few weeks ago, in Panama, we took an important step towards strengthening, deepening and developing our regional cooperation. We agreed on the broadest possible review and modernization of our regional institutional framework, as we were convinced that the benefits of development to which our people are entitled cannot be tapped by each country separately — they are attainable only to a regional community, because of the dynamics of today's increasingly interdependent environment.

For the first time, at our most recent meeting in Managua, all the Governments of the area agreed that we need to look beyond economic integration and clearly show the will and resolve needed to direct our efforts towards a possible regional political union, a community of independent nations that pool their capabilities without losing their individuality. And that is how we agreed to begin the gradual and continuing process of setting up the Central American Union, as a higher expression of communitarian partnership stipulated in the 1991 Protocol of Tegucigalpa.

Thus, we have taken the first step in a broad and complex process that can bring us closer to the vision of a Central American Union, with the ultimate goal of producing the concrete results sought by our populations: overcoming poverty, creating opportunities, increasing the number of jobs, activating our production capacity, increasing our competitiveness, equitable and unified participation in the benefits of development, genuine democratization, equitable access to an efficient system of justice and the legitimate enjoyment of peaceful coexistence.

We have redoubled our efforts to ensure that Central America is more united and better prepared to face the enormous challenges of its development and to respond creatively and dynamically to the international demands of our contemporary and ever changing world. We, the Central American leaders, have come together to this forum as genuinely united nations to demonstrate our common aim of regional unity and the efforts we are making to that end. We reiterate our deep appreciation for the support and cooperation of the international community to date, and I offer my best wishes for the prosperity of all as the new millennium dawns.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Guatemala for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Alvaro Arzú Irigoyen, President of the Republic of Guatemala, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. José María Figueres Olsen, President of the Republic of Costa Rica

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Costa Rica.

Mr. José María Figueres Olsen, President of the Republic of Costa Rica, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. José María Figueres Olsen, President of the Republic of Costa Rica, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Figueres Olsen (*interpretation from Spanish*): Allow me to begin by congratulating you, Sir, on your election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-second session. Costa Rica joins the previous expressions of appreciation that have been addressed to you and wishes you every success in this period that will be remembered for its special contribution to the reform of this highest forum of international politics.

Ten years ago Central America surprised the world by proclaiming peace. Ten years ago nations separated by hatred and divided by ancestral injustices decided to put an end to their differences through dialogue and reconciliation and to move, without haste, but also without delay, towards a more promising future of equality and sustainable development.

The world has changed greatly in this decade. The walls of intolerance fell in Berlin and in Pretoria; the

Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo have not lost any more children. There is no doubt that we live in turbulent times but, most world leaders, regardless of their religion or ethnic origin, subscribe to the widespread conviction that the models of the cold war cannot guide us through the new millennium. Moreover at the global level, despite the temporary images from Sarajevo, Kigali, Rwanda and Monrovia, there prevails a vision of a twenty-first century in which democracy, reason and justice reign.

My people believes in peace. My people believes in disarmament. My people believes that the destiny of the human family is one of harmony and solidarity under the auspices of international law. These beliefs are not the product of intellectual speculation. Costa Rica has lived for more than 100 years in a democracy protected by pluralism and respect for human rights. My compatriots, men and women, are aware that they are the sons and daughters of a nation whose history proves that there is no force stronger than that of reason. This is why, when our armed forces were abolished as a standing institution in 1948, almost at the same time as the United Nations was being born, Costa Rica declared peace to the world and thus unequivocally showed its profound love for harmony among all the peoples of the world.

Central America comes to this forum united around an ideal of common integration and working together on a shared democratic project. For the first time in history, our countries come before the General Assembly to declare not just their reiterated adherence to the Charter and to the principles and obligations inherent in civilized coexistence in the community of nations, but also their intention to march decisively towards unity as a higher stage in the communitarian partnership that we already enjoy under the 1991 Protocol of Tegucigalpa.

For the last three years, Central America has made a great effort to link up with the rest of the world, something we regard as essential if we are to realize the objectives and priorities of our Alliance for Sustainable Development. This initiative, signed in 1994, was the first in the world to be adopted since the Declaration of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development.

The fruits of this effort have been abundant. Central America has established preferential relations with Canada, Chile, the United States, Japan, Mexico, the Republic of Korea and the European Union. The biggest innovation has been the definition of agendas based not on short-term interests, but on regional strategic priorities. We are now concentrating on improving integration by thoroughly reforming regional institutions. Convinced that economic growth can be achieved only if accompanied by increasing levels of sustainable development, the Central American countries wish to inform the international community of our decision to move forward resolutely towards a common future, a future of great progress and solidarity for our peoples.

The world today is still diverse, still divided. Many cultures and societies live on a single shared planet. In today's complex scenario, now that the Cold War is over, divisions remain and new dangers threaten international society. This is why the United Nations continues to be the meeting point, the unifying institution for all of us. It will continue to play that important role, provided we shoulder our commitments, face our challenges and make progressive changes.

Since our Secretary-General presented his proposals for reform in July, the Central American countries have expressed firm support for his ideas about a modern, efficient, nimble Organization with better coordination in line with current administrative and financial trends, an Organization enabling us, without further delay, to move from lofty aspirations to real actions that will help everybody, especially those in developing countries, which comprise the overwhelming majority of the members of this body. We take this opportunity to reiterate our clear and firm support for the Secretary-General's proposals submitted to Member States for consideration at this session.

United Nations reform should be accompanied by a constructive review of the scale of assessments. In Central America we believe that the criteria for the scale of assessments need to be changed so that all Member States contribute financially to the Organization in accordance with their means.

The Central American countries believe that the international peace and security system designed in 1945 should be subject to detailed review in a broad and consensual exercise. In principle, we support the idea of increasing the number of Member States with permanent membership in the Security Council. We believe, at the same time, that any such proposal must be democratic and representative of the plurality of States and regions that make up the United Nations. In particular, we strongly support the argument that the three developing regions of the world should have permanent representation in that organ and that the veto power, if

there is no willingness to eliminate it, should be confined to topics under Chapter VII of the Charter.

The founders of the United Nations saw a world that had to decide between peace and extermination. Still affected by the Second World War, they were well placed to understand that humanity had no other choice but to shelter under the protection of international law as the only way of preventing a new Holocaust. More than 50 years later, we have a similar duty, but one that is less dramatic thanks to the significant progress made since the end of the Cold War: the duty to provide the United Nations with the political, financial and administrative conditions it needs so that it can continue its work for peace and international security. Central America is ready to make its contribution so that these noble objectives may be attained.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Costa Rica for the statement he has just made.

Mr. José María Figueres Olsen, President of the Republic of Costa Rica, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Armando Calderón Sol, President of the Republic of El Salvador.

The President: The Assembly will next hear an address by the President of the Republic of El Salvador.

Mr. Armando Calderón Sol, President of the Republic of El Salvador, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations the President of the Republic of El Salvador, His Excellency Mr. Armando Calderón Sol, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Calderón Sol (El Salvador) *(interpretation from Spanish)*: On behalf of the people and Government of El Salvador, I should like to convey to you, Mr. President, our congratulations on your election to preside over this session. To your predecessor, Mr. Razali Ismail of Malaysia, we extend our gratitude for his efforts and initiatives aimed at making progress in the modernization of the United Nations.

We commend the Secretary-General for his remarkable work during the first year of his term and, in particular, for the progress made in reforming the Organization.

More than five years after the signing of the peace accords in El Salvador, we can state with satisfaction that we have fulfilled and achieved the objectives that we agreed to. The far-reaching changes that have taken place in Salvadoran society have received universal recognition, as they represent one of the most successful undertakings of greatest scope carried out with the support of the Organization.

Our Government's responsibilities and obligations do not end with compliance with the peace agreements, but continue throughout time and space with a view to safeguarding the achievements that we have registered in the areas of democratization and respect for human rights, and also to meet the priority needs of Salvadoran society. We Salvadorans are dedicated to building a new El Salvador, attacking at their root causes of poverty and social marginalization and promoting a fairer and more equitable society.

The successful conclusion of the peace processes in Nicaragua, El Salvador and, recently, Guatemala and the establishment of democratic Governments have created a situation conducive to regional stability, transforming Central America into a region of peace, freedom, democracy and development. Central America has made great progress in demilitarization and in the strengthening of civil society, holding free, transparent and pluralist elections; integrating former combatants into national political processes; strengthening democratic institutions and the rule of law; and implementing a development programme whose central focus is the human being.

In the face of globalization and the processes of economic openness and regionalization, we need to be even more creative in tackling present and future challenges. For this reason we are reviewing the Central American institutional system so as to make it possible for us better and more effectively to take our place in the new world order.

The aspiration of the peoples of Central America to pursue a common destiny through the reunification of our greater nation has always been latent among our peoples. It is becoming increasingly clear that unity is the best road for Central America to take so that it can successfully tackle the challenges of the coming millennium. It was in this spirit that on 2 September we

signed the Nicaragua Declaration with a view to speeding up the process of unification. Today we come to share our resolve to pursue political union in Central America. We want the international community and the United Nations to be witnesses to our efforts, and before them we commit ourselves to do all that is within our power to achieve this objective. In order to achieve this goal, we ask that friendly countries and multilateral institutions continue to support us and to provide timely assistance, so that our national and regional efforts can complement one another, and to enable us to have at our disposal an effective mechanism for realizing our aspirations.

I should like to comment on issues of far-reaching importance on the agenda of the General Assembly that are vital for the Organization itself. We stand convinced that the principles of the Organization remain valid and that it is a unique, *sui generis* institution, essential and irreplaceable in the international system, and that its reform is necessary in order to adapt it to the demands of the new international order. With respect to the proposed reforms put forward by the Secretary-General, my Government supports the institutional changes that will be necessary for the Organization efficiently to respond to the common problems faced by our nations.

For the United Nations to function better, it must be able to rely on adequate and predictable financial resources. It is the responsibility of Member States to fulfil our financial obligations, which cannot be subject to any kind of conditionality, so as to safeguard the independence, impartiality and credibility of the Organization's activities.

Reform of the Security Council is necessary in order to overcome the imbalances that exist in its current composition. We support an appropriate increase in the number of permanent and non-permanent members, so that the Council will be representative of the number of Members that the Organization now has. These new members should have the same rights and obligations and be designated in conformity with the principle of geographical distribution, so as to include developing countries in both categories. We believe it particularly important to devote attention to the Council's working methods and procedure so as to ensure that the decision-making process is participatory, democratic and transparent and involves effective coordination among all the organs of the system.

The United Nations was created to be universal in nature. Therefore all peace-loving States that accept the obligations enshrined in the Charter should be Members of it. For this reason, we reaffirm our support for the just aspiration of the Republic of China on Taiwan to rejoin the Organization on the basis of the principle of universality, which is the distinguishing mark of the United Nations.

In conclusion, I wish to state that the people of Central America are grateful for the work of the United Nations in the process of peacemaking, democratization and development in Central America. We recognize the efforts that the Organization is continuing to make to promote international peace and security by seeking to settle conflicts by peaceful means and in accordance with the principles of international law.

On the threshold of a new century, nations are facing tremendous challenges. We invoke the aid of God so that peace, freedom and human values may prevail among the peoples of the earth.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of El Salvador for the important statement he has just made.

Mr. Armando Calderón Sol, President of the Republic of El Salvador, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Carlos Roberto Reina Idiáquez, President of the Republic of Honduras

The President: The General Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Honduras.

Mr. Carlos Roberto Reina Idiáquez, President of the Republic of Honduras, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations the President of the Republic of Honduras, His Excellency Mr. Carlos Roberto Reina Idiáquez, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Reina Idiáquez (Honduras) (*interpretation from Spanish*): At the outset, I would like to extend to you, Sir, my sincere congratulations on your election to the presidency of this session of the General Assembly. Your election is well-deserved recognition of your great personal qualities and a tribute to Ukraine. We wish you success in the exercise of your duties.

My delegation would also like to extend its appreciation to the Permanent Representative of Malaysia to the United Nations, Mr. Razali Ismail, for his excellent work during the previous session of the General Assembly.

We also extend our sincere thanks to Mr. Kofi Annan, who in carrying out his mission as the Secretary-General of our Organization has demonstrated a remarkable spirit of hard work and commitment during a particularly difficult time for the United Nations in the maintenance of international peace and in the complex task of restructuring and strengthening of this institution.

The most noticeable feature of the world as the end of the century approaches is the generalized spread of democracy. Almost all the nations of the world share this way of life, thereby giving the end of the century a character which has no parallel in past centuries. We are finally living in an era of democracy after a long night of dictatorship and totalitarianism in various parts of the globe. But this universalization of democracy goes hand in hand with something which — for lack of a better name — we might call the malaise of democracy. Dissatisfaction can be heard everywhere; this political system is being called into question in the name of development and prosperity. Democracy with extreme poverty is not the model we seek.

Representative government is a political gain of the modern age, but it is only the halfway point on the road to full human development. It must be accompanied by other elements which are essential to a life of dignity: wellbeing, justice, involvement and a full understanding of the human being as both the root and the fruit of all our efforts.

If there is one thing which we will have to do in the future, particularly in forums such as the General Assembly, it is to find formulas that can provide for a workable relationship between democracy and development, between prosperity and equity, and between growing wealth and disappearing poverty.

The United Nations faces challenges and expectations with regard to this serious matter of the viability of democracy. There is perhaps today no more important task. If freedom, the essence of this political system, is disparaged in the name of growth without values, then the loss of generations sacrificed on the battlefields in this tortured century will lose all meaning. That danger does exist, and those of us who know from our own painful experience the crimes that can be committed in the name of progress have a duty to alert everyone to it.

In recent years, five successive Governments have come to power legitimately in Honduras through free elections. This is unprecedented in our history and it allows us to say that we are indeed practising democracy, which is a lesson we never finish learning. Our experience shows once again that free elections, while being the basis of Governments, are not in themselves sufficient to consolidate the system or to guarantee the complete satisfaction of the people.

Since 1994 we have been trying to involve our people more in major national decisions and we have been trying to pay more attention to their needs through an open dialogue. This is part of our belief that it is essential to move forward from formal democracy to real democracy, if we want it to be more than a constitutional expression and become part of the living culture of our people.

Democratic culture as a way of life requires constant vigilance to bolster its credibility and to legitimize its existence every day. This is why in our part of Central America, Honduras, we have regarded it as essential to back up this form of government with an ongoing reaffirmation of its ethical values and a resolute campaign against all forms of corruption, which is one of the worst and most vexatious enemies of democracy.

In late November this year, Honduras will hold another election to change its Government. I am pleased to be able to report to the international community that this process will be free and transparent and that once again the people will decide the Government for the next four-year term.

Economic indicators provided by national and international institutions agree that at the end of our mandate there has been a significant improvement in the Honduran economy. We are pleased to be able to hand over to the new authorities a country that is in better shape than it was when we began our term. This could well be the real meaning of democracy: constant improvement in living conditions and moving from one level to another through successive Governments — with the free vote of the people being the final judge of what is to be done.

The Honduran way of finding common ground in order to reach agreement on the kind of country we want has been to establish permanent interaction between the governors and the governed.

These last four years of government have to a large extent been an ongoing debate with civil society, the healthy results of which confirm, on the one hand, the advantages of participation and, on the other, the capacities of Government. This is what democracy teaches us, its most valuable lesson.

Much indeed remains to be done, but we are on the right track. We have established solid juridical bases. We have made tangible progress and are building a dynamic State respectful of the law, dependable in justice and, above all, conscious of the enormous needs of the Honduran people and their inalienable right to be the principal focus of development. The social expenditures of the Honduran State in 1998 will account for over 30 per cent of our national budget. This is a clear message to our people.

It is well known that Honduras is part of the great Central American family. We were united in the colonial period and we were united when we attained independence. Separation and fragmentation have simply been a long parenthesis, occasionally interrupted by fleeting attempts at unity. What is important, however, is the will of our countries, repeatedly expressed, to come together again and their demonstrated desire for union, which has always sought new forms of expression and can be wiped out neither by the passage of time nor by setbacks of any kind.

From 1994 to today, two major events have marked life in Central America. The Alliance for Sustainable Development (ALIDES) was signed in 1994 and an agreement was reached to initiate the gradual and progressive establishment of the Central American union as the higher expression of the community association laid down in the 1991 Tegucigalpa Protocol, contained in the Nicaragua Declaration of 2 September 1997.

The Alliance represents a radical change in the integration agenda of Central America, a new concept of development, making it integral to and indivisible from the benefit of the human individual. Sustainable development, as advocated by ALIDES, is a recognition that growth may be pursued while protecting the future — we can grow today without jeopardizing the development of generations to come.

It is also an alliance with nature, a new relationship and a revaluation of our resources. It seeks to avoid the negative consequences of a short-term approach and to look to the lasting prosperity of our peoples. Lastly, it exploits our new competitive advantages: our situation as an isthmus, our long coastlines, our inter-ocean facilities, our magnificent biodiversity and the beauty of the Caribbean region. We are committed to building ALIDES. It is fitting to acknowledge that the originality of our approach has been recognized at the world level and is being endorsed by important entities.

The main content of the Nicaragua Declaration that I have just mentioned is the agreement on Central American union. While we have been working on regional integration, the absence of a political lodestar has wrought a lack of coherence at the regional level. We are now resolved, however, to deal with this lodestar and this political dimension in a gradual and progressive approach that does not run roughshod over history. This will bring us together and define us, giving substance to the vision of Central America shared by the rest of the world.

Our decision is neither utopian nor romantic, although we are such stuff as dreams are made on, as Shakespeare says. We are not talking here of utopias or romanticism. Our decision is simply an act of maturity, a realistic recognition of the needs created by our internal development and by external demands which, if we are to survive with dignity, will require us to make enormous efforts that, in our case, transcend our capabilities as divided, individual States.

We have established a working committee to draft the bases and principles for Central American union. By the end of the year, we should have the relevant documents. The process will culminate in the signing of the formal commitment to political unity.

Those who are familiar with Central American history and aware of our current efforts in the various fields of integration know that Central American union is not simply an act of faith; it is, rather, a work of engineering, an enormous undertaking that, taking into account the unique qualities of each of our States, is the key to the exercise of joint sovereignty.

The peoples of the United Nations must be informed of this important decision. That is why the five Central American Presidents are here, in this highest world forum, spreading the good news of this political decision. Through the representatives here, we wish the world to learn of this great decision and to accept our aspirations, which are shared by other regions of the world. In this context, my country reiterates its endorsement of the right of the Republic of China to become a Member of the United Nations family. We support the work of that great nation, which is seeking ways to participate fully in this

and in other international forums without any form of exclusion or hegemony.

I wish now to refer to Honduras's support for the process of deep-rooted change in the United Nations, both in its various fields of operation as well as in its internal decision-making organs. The world in which the United Nations was created was not what it is today and we must therefore keep up with the times.

On the question of the Security Council, we would repeat what was said at the forty-ninth session of the General Assembly and reiterate our belief that a solution to the question of the size of the Council's membership cannot be rushed. Moreover, my country endorses the statement on the strengthening of the United Nations and Security Council reform adopted at the eleventh Summit of the Rio Group. This stated that the Latin American and Caribbean region must be taken into account in any proposal relating to an increase in the Security Council's membership.

We are pleased at the mine-clearance work that has been carried out with international support. In the case of Honduras, this work is particularly important because of the lives taken and mutilations caused by this inhumane practice that is now receiving universal condemnation, a condemnation that we firmly and decidedly support.

Finally, we would like to express once again how pleased we are at the regional and world treatment of the subject of corruption. As the world becomes aware of how this scourge affects the development and peaceful existence of peoples, we will finally make progress towards vanquishing it in the various parts of the world.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Honduras for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Carlos Roberto Reina Idiaquez, President of the Republic of Honduras, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Agenda item 9 *(continued)*

General debate

The President: I shall now call on those representatives who wish to speak in exercise of the right of reply. May I remind members that statements in exercise of the right of reply are limited to 10 minutes for the first intervention and to five minutes for the second, and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Effendi (Indonesia): For the record, my delegation would like to exercise its right of reply in response to the unwarranted references to East Timor made by the representative of Portugal to the General Assembly in his statement earlier this afternoon. The contents of that statement have led us to question Portugal's sincerity and commitment in the ongoing tripartite dialogue held under the auspices of the United Nations Secretary-General.

It is to be recalled that during the ninth tripartite talks of last June, the Foreign Ministers of Indonesia and Portugal reaffirmed their commitment to work in a cooperative spirit in order to achieve a lasting solution to the question of East Timor. The General Assembly itself has deferred the discussion of the issue for 14 consecutive years. It must be emphasized that Portugal cannot, on the one hand, call for a consultative dialogue under the auspices of the Secretary-General and, on the other, use every opportunity to campaign negatively on the issue of East Timor.

It is also surprising for Portugal to still speak on the need of the exercise of the right of self-determination of the people of East Timor while the historical fact confirms that the problems can be attributed to the irresponsible actions of Portugal itself. It was in August 1975 that the then-Portuguese colonial authority left the armaments and ammunition to the minority group they favoured and abandoned East Timor to civil war, hoping that the armed minority would prevail. The armed remnants of this minority were once headed by Mr. Gusmao. Indeed, it would have been timely and appropriate for Portugal to have heard the voices of the people of East Timor 22 years ago and implemented their wishes and aspiration for self-determination and decolonization, and not now, 22 years after the defeat of the Portuguese-favoured minority group.

It is pertinent to recall in this regard that it was in the face of such irresponsible abandonment that the East Timorese people had rightly assumed the right to decolonize themselves, considering themselves no longer bound to any erstwhile colonial Power. They did so by choosing independence through integration with Indonesia in accordance with resolutions 1514 (XV), 1541 (XV) and 2625 (XXV).

Finally, we Indonesians remain fully committed to the people of East Timor and fully support them in their determined efforts to build a prosperous and happy future for their children and themselves, as they are already an integrated part of Indonesia.

Mrs. Gomes (Portugal): To set the record straight, allow me to recall that the process of decolonization of East Timor is not completed. East Timor remains a Non-Self-Governing Territory, and this question is included in the General Assembly's agenda. Indonesia has failed so far to comply with the basic principles of the Charter and of resolutions 1514 (XV) and 1541 (XV) and of the relevant resolutions adopted by the General Assembly and the Security Council on the question of East Timor. In an effort to settle this issue, Portugal and Indonesia have engaged in negotiations under the auspices of the United Nations Secretary-General. I would like to reaffirm here the commitment of Portugal to this negotiating process and in assisting the Secretary-General in his endeavours to achieve a just, comprehensive and internationally acceptable settlement to this protracted problem. As was stressed this morning in a memorandum circulated by the Presidency of the European Union on behalf of its member States, that settlement shall fully respect the rights of the people of East Timor in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and the principles of the Charter.

Mr. Effendi (Indonesia): The response by the representative of Portugal contains no new elements, and the Indonesian delegation therefore does not wish to prolong this debate any further by repeating at length and in detail the events that led to the subsequent decision of the people of East Timor to become independent through integration with Indonesia. Suffice it to say that the position of Indonesia is clear and the process of decolonization was completed when the East Timorese exercised their right to self-determination in conformity with General Assembly resolutions which I have previously mentioned. For over two decades now, the people of East Timor have been sharing fully in the progress achieved by Indonesia, together with other Indonesian citizens.

Mrs. Gomes (Portugal): We share the view expressed by our colleague from Indonesia that, indeed, nothing else new has been added with this last statement in exercise of the right of reply, so we trust that the membership knows the facts and is able to judge, and we have nothing else to add.

The meeting rose at 6.10 p.m.